HEALING THE WOUNDS OF TRAUMA

Posted on April 22, 2020 by Eddie

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Category: Observations

Today's blog post takes the form of a written interview with our friends and colleagues Larry and Cami Robbins. Their work is inspiring at the best of times and very relevant to us today.

Could you tell us a little bit about yourselves? Where do you come from?

Larry and I are both â€œmissionary kidsâ€ . Larry was born and grew up in Mexico where his parents served as Bible translators with Wycliffe. Cami was born in France where her parents were studying French on the way to serve as church planting missionaries in what was then called â€œFrench Equatorial Africaâ€ (now Central African Republic).

What different roles have you held Wycliffe?

We started out as Bible Translators in 1980. We worked in 3 different translation projects in French speaking Central Africa. Larry has served as a field entity director with me as his assistant, also he has served in the international administration of our organization. Now we both serve as trauma healing facilitators and coordinators.

How come you have agreed to be interviewed for Kouyanet?

We are enthusiastic readers of Kouyanet. Eddieâ€™s posts are always relevant, interesting, thought provoking, and informative. So when Eddie asked us if we would agree to be interviewed, we said, â€œYes!â€

What is your current work role and where exactly do you work?

We are coordinators for the work of trauma healing in French speaking Africa. We usually live in Bangui, Central African Republic where we work closely with 3 partner organizations to hold training workshops for pastors and Christian leaders. But we also travel to other African countries where we hold workshops and trainings. When we are in our home country, we hold trainings, too. We also do a lot of consulting by email, and a lot of listening to hurting people. We also lead camps for children who are hurting.

Trauma healing? Itâ€™s not a term that we come across in everyday life; *what exactly do you mean by it?*

Trauma is a subset of grief (mourning a loss). When we experience trauma we feel intense fear, helplessness and overwhelmed by the magnitude of our loss. When we are not traumatized, we feel like there is order and justice in the world, and that we have value. When we are traumatized, we feel that there is only chaos, no justice, and that we have no value.

How would you answer someone who said that this sounds more like psychology than Christian ministry?

The title of the program that we follow is called â€œHealing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church can helpâ€ . The idea is that there are biblical principles that are in line with good mental health practices, that Christian leaders can follow in order to help people in their congregations or neighbourhoods to heal from trauma. These are practices that all Christians can follow, which are not counselling, but rather coming alongside a hurting person (Rom. 12:15,19.21), listening with compassion (Gal. 6:2, James 1:19) , helping them express their pain through lament (Ps 13), helping them bring their pain to Jesus (Isaiah 53:4)â€¦

You work for Wycliffe Bible Translators, what is the connection between trauma healing and Bible translation?

The program that we use was developed in early 2001 in Africa during a time when many countries in Africa were experiencing massive civil unrest. Populations were suffering unspeakably. When we are traumatized, the thinking part of our brain gets disconnected from the heart, or feelings. But the Word of God needs to penetrate not just our thinking, but also our hearts. Our leaders saw that the translated Scriptures were not reaching peoplesâ€™ hearts because of their trauma. This was the impetus to develop this Bible based program to help African pastors use the translated Scriptures to minister healing to the heart wounds of their congregations. The program remained mostly in Africa for some years, but now it is being used all over the world.

So, what happens during a trauma healing workshop?

In a trauma healing workshop we have 5 core lessons:

1. If God loves us why do we suffer?
2. What is a heart wound?
3. What happens when we grieve?
4. Taking our pain to the cross.

5. Forgiveness.

In addition to these core lessons, we have lessons that help people with specific traumas. For example: How to help children who have experienced bad things, How to help people who have been sexually assaulted, How to help people with addictionsâ€¦and now we have a lesson on Covid 19. We choose the additional lessons based on the needs of the participants.

What do the participants go on to do once the workshops are over?

After taking an initial equipping workshop (usually 5 days), the plan is for the participants to hold â€œhealing groupsâ€ . During the equipping workshop, they do practice teaching of part of a lesson to prepare them for this activity. A healing group is usually a small group that meets maybe once a week for 2 hours. During the healing group the faciliators go through the core lessons, and any other lessons that the group needs. It might go on for 2-3 months. We hope that people will continue to hold healing groups over the years, and that some of the people from the healing groups, will go on to take an equipping workshop, and lead healing groups of their own.



How does being involved in trauma healing work affect you personally?

We have personally experienced civil unrest and war in 3 different African countries. We have been evacuated 5 times. During our first workshop, we began to experience healing from our own trauma, even while helping others work through theirs. Each time we lead a workshop, we are touched as we see God working in the lives of others to heal them mind, body and spirit, through this program.

If people want to know more or if they want to pray for your work, where can they find information?

CR: If someone would like to pray for our work, they can receive our monthly-ish prayer letter by writing to: cami_robbins@sil.org. If they would like to learn more about this trauma healing ministry

they should go to the website of the American Bible Society at traumahealinginstitute.org. There are helpful resources available to download.



Many people in the Western world find themselves in a very unfamiliar and stressful situation because of coronavirus; what advice would you give them based on your experience of dealing with trauma.

Recognize that this is trauma and they are mourning loss. When we are experiencing trauma, it makes us more tired, and we can experience a lot of other symptoms, too: irritableness, clumsiness, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite (or the opposite)â€¦Be kind to yourself. Take more time to rest, go for walks if you can, read books or watch a video that makes you laugh. Everyone processes trauma differently. Be gracious with others who are either feeling worse than you do, or seem to not be taking it seriously. Write a lament, a letter to God telling Him your fears, your pain, your loss, and what you want him to do. Listen to music, sing. For more suggestions, go to traumahealinginstitute.org. You can also download a document that can be printed out as a handy reference. It was developed by our Trauma Healing team here in the U.S.